(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) and (b) While the prices of essential food products have increased in the recent past, it is not due to decline in the production of agricultural commodities. As per the 3rd Advance Estimates released on 22nd April, 2008, production of foodgrains during 2007-08 is estimated at 227.32 million tonnes which is about 10 million tonnes more than the production during the previous year. Production of oilseeds during 2007-08 is estimated at 28.21 million tonnes which is about 4 million tonnes more than the previous year. However, to moderate the prices of food products, Government has taken the following steps, among others:

1. Export of wheat has been banned with effect from 09.02.2007 until further orders.
2. To augment availability of wheat, Government allowed to import 23 lakh tonnes of wheat of which about 18 lakh tonnes has arrived in India as on 26.03.2008.
3. Export of non-basmati rice has been banned with effect from 01.04.2008.
4. Department of Revenue *vide* its notification no. 37/2008-Customs dated 20.03.2008 has issued orders for reducing import duty on rice to zero up 31.03.2009. Government also directed that the order regarding removal of instructions on licensing, stock limits and movement of rice be kept in abeyance for a period of 1 year.
5. The Central Issue Price for rice and wheat has not been increased since 01.07.2002.
6. Ban on export of pulses, effective from 22.06.2006 (except export of Kabuli Chana with effect from 07.03.2007), has been extended up to 31.03.2009.
7. Validity of import of pulses at zero duty, effective from 08.06.2006, has been extended up to 31.03.2009.
8. Among the edible oils, import duty has been reduced to zero on crude edible oils; to 7.5% on refined, hydrogenated oils and hydrogenated vegetable oils. Customs duty on butter and ghee has been reduced to 30%.
9. 4% additional countervailing duty on all edible oils has been withdrawn.
10. With effect from 01.04.2008, export of edible oils has been prohibited up to 31.03.2009.

(c) to (e) As part of the Rehabilitation Package for the farmers in suicide prone districts, the Ministry of Agriculture has proposed to declare the Kuttanad Wetland Eco-system in Kerala as Special Agricultural Zone. There is no other proposal to develop Special Agricultural Zones.

**Damage of crops due to unseasonal rains and thunder squalls**

3399. SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:
SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the recent spells of unseasonal rains and thunder squalls have caused extensive damages to standing crops in various States across the country;

(b) if so, whether any assessment of damage to crops have been made;

(c) if so, whether Government, in view of recent damage of crops, proposes to provide any help to the affected farmers; and

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(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) to (d) The information is being collected and will be laid on Table of the House.

**Unseasonal rain in South India**

3400. SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR:
SHRI ABDUL WAHAB PEEVEE:
SHRI K.E. ISMAIL:
DR. V. MAITREYAN:
SHRI N.R. GOVINDARAJAR:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether an assessment has been made of the loss caused to crops, life and property due to unseasonal rain in southern States of the country during the month of March in this year;

(b) if so, the details thereof, State-wise and commodity-wise; and

(c) the rescue operations, special economic package and the Central assistance given to the States, State-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) to (c) The Ministry of Home Affairs is concerned in the matter and necessary information is being collected from them.

**Ban on export of milk and milk products**

3401. DR. V. MAITREYAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the export of milk and milk products is still being banned by Government;

(b) if so, when it is likely to be lifted;

(c) whether it is also a fact that Government has lost heavily on the earning of the foreign exchange account due to this ban;

(d) if so, the estimated revenue loss due to this measure; and

(e) what is the total annual production of milk and milk products in the country during the last five years and the total consumption during this period and what is the total exports of these products during the same period?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) and (b) No, Sir. As per prevailing Foreign Trade Policy, export of milk and milk product is free. The prohibition on export of milk and milk products imposed *vide* notification No. 45 dated 9th February 2007 was effective till 30.09.2007 only.

(c) and (d) The available information on export realization is as given below.

| Year | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 (Apr. to June, 07) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Value (in Rs. Lacs) | 67668.24 | 43613.04 | 4093.75 |